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UNCLAS ABUJA 000724

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: "INTERPOL" INTERVIEWS NIGERIA'S CHIEF JUSTICE

CLASSIFIED BY COUNSELOR JAMES MAXSTADT FOR REASONS 1.5 B AND
[1D](#).

[11](#). (SBU) Chief Justice of Nigeria Mohammed Lawal Uwais met with a team of local and international law enforcement officers April 19 over a bribery scandal variously reported at 250 million Naira or 5 billion Naira. Press reports named Ogbonna Onova, Deputy Inspector General of Police (CID), as the lead investigator for INTERPOL of an allegation that some Justices from the Supreme Court collected the payments to give a favorable judgement for Governor James Ibori of Delta State in an election tribunal. The suit against Ibori's 2003 election centers on Ibori not being eligible to run for election because of a previous conviction for fraud, and the bribe was allegedly for judges to allow submissions that the convicted Ibori was some other fellow named Ibori.

[12](#). (C) Supreme Court Registrar Danlami Senchi confirmed to Emboff that Chief Justice Uwais has given approval to the investigators to question other justices and staff of the Supreme Court. In February, 2004, a group calling itself the "Derivation Front" distributed a document to media houses alleging that Ibori had bribed some Justices to get a favorable judgement. Four days after the allegation, the Supreme Court delivered a judgement ruling that one James Onanefe Ibori had been convicted in the Bwari Area Court in 1995, but sending the case back to the originating court to determine whether the Ibori of the Bwari case is actually Delta Governor Ibori. Post has been unable to ascertain what the INTERPOL angle is -- Governor Ibori, the Justices, and the election are all Nigerian.

[13](#). (C) BACKGROUND: Ibori's real battle is with political chieftains from his own party, the ruling PDP, and stems from his ties to VP Atiku and PDP Governor Ngige of Anambra. Two PDP members, Owolomo Agbi and Anthony Alabi, challenged Ibori's eligibility to hold office due to his previous court conviction. Under Nigeria's Constitution, persons convicted of any among a wide range of crimes are barred from holding public office. Fraud qualifies.
ROBERTS